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Damage by Soviet described

British won't comment on spy report

London (Reuter)—The British government declined comment yesterday on a *New York Times* report that a British security leak had allowed the Soviet Union to penetrate Western intelligence.

A Home Office spokesman referred all inquiries to the prime minister's office where an official said: "We do not comment on security matters."

The report said highly sensitive information about U.S. and British interception of Soviet communications had been supplied to Moscow in "one of the longest and potentially most damaging Soviet penetrations of Western intelligence since World War II."

The *New York Times* said yesterday that British intelligence officials had determined that Geoffrey Arthur Prime, a former translator, had supplied the Soviet Union with highly sensitive information while he was employed as a linguist at Britain's main electronic intelligence cen-

ter in Cheltenham from 1968 to 1977. Mr. Prime was charged with espionage last summer.

An opposition British Labor member of parliament, Ted Leadbitter, urged Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to make an urgent statement to Parliament on the report.

"I am confirmed in my view from what I have heard that our intelligence services do not appear to have taken much to heart in the warnings that have been expressed in the House of Commons," Mr. Leadbitter said.

Meanwhile, British newspapers speculated that a Soviet diplomat in Tehran who recently defected to Britain may be a senior officer of the Soviet KGB intelligence service.

The right-wing *Sunday Express* said the diplomat, Vladimir Kuzichkin, had made devastating revelations to British intelligence.

It said he had identified hundreds of KGB officers in the Middle East and some in Britain and given a dramatic insight into the battle inside the

Kremlin to succeed ailing President Leonid I. Brezhnev.

The mass-circulation *News of the World* said he had defected after falling in love with a beautiful Egyptian-born British woman agent.

The independent *Sunday Times* said Mr. Kuzichkin left Iran in June and "since then Britain has been using his knowledge to undermine Soviet spy networks around the world and to supply disinformation to the Russians."

It said that, after his defection, Britain leaked information about communists in Iran to the regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, resulting in raids on offices of the pro-Moscow Tudeh Party.

The liberal *Observer* said Mr. Kuzichkin's age, 35, cast doubt on the reports that he was a "big fish." It suggested that the reports in the right-wing press had political motives, saying: "claims by the intelligence service to have netted a 'big fish' must be seen in the light of its need for more funds from the treasury at a time of financial stringency."